

U.S. PATENT APPLICATION

for

**MILITARY VEHICLE HAVING COOPERATIVE CONTROL
NETWORK WITH DISTRIBUTED I/O INTERFACING**

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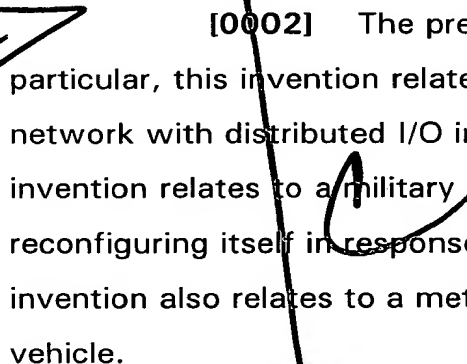
MILITARY VEHICLE HAVING COOPERATIVE CONTROL NETWORK WITH DISTRIBUTED I/O INTERFACING

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Ser. No. 09/384,393, filed August 27, 1999, pending, which is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Ser. No. 09/364,690, filed July 30, 1999, abandoned.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention


[0002] The present invention relates to military vehicles. In particular, this invention relates to a military vehicle having a cooperative control network with distributed I/O interfacing. In a particularly preferred aspect, this invention relates to a military vehicle having a control system that is capable of reconfiguring itself in response to a failure mode of operation. The present invention also relates to a method of controlling electrical devices on a military vehicle.

2. Description of Related Art

[0003] A diverse array of military vehicles exist that are used in combat and non-combat scenarios. Such vehicles include vehicles that are found only in military settings, such as tanks, as well as vehicles that are military adaptations of widely used civilian vehicles, such as dump trucks, water pump trucks, wrecker trucks (for towing other vehicles), telephone trucks (for digging holes for telephone poles), and so on. Depending on the type of military vehicle and its intended military application, it is often desirable for the military vehicle to be able to withstand a severe amount of punishment and yet still remain operational, for example, when the vehicle has been damaged by enemy fire, nearby explosions, and so on.

[0005] There is an ongoing need for improved military vehicle control systems that are intelligent and robust. There is also an ongoing need for improved military vehicle control systems that are intelligent and robust and that can continue to operate at a maximum level of effectiveness when the vehicle is damaged by enemy fire, nearby explosions, and so on. The present invention provides a military vehicle control system that meets these needs.

[0006] According to a first aspect of the invention, a power distribution and control system for a military vehicle comprises a power source, a power transmission link, a plurality of input and output devices, a plurality of microprocessor-based interface modules, and a communication network that interconnects the interface modules. The interface modules are also each coupled to respective local subsets of the input and output devices so as to permit distributed data collection from the input devices and distributed power distribution to the output devices. Each of the interface modules collects input

status information from the respective local subset of the input devices and broadcasts the input status information over the communication network to each of the remaining ones of the interface modules. Each of the remaining ones of the interface modules receive the input status information and locally store the input status information.

[0007] Other objects, features, and advantages of the present invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art from the following detailed description and accompanying drawings. It should be understood, however, that the detailed description and specific examples, while indicating preferred embodiments of the present invention, are given by way of illustration and not limitation. Many modifications and changes within the scope of the present invention may be made without departing from the spirit thereof, and the invention includes all such modifications.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0008] Fig. 1 is a schematic view of a fire truck having a control system according to one embodiment of the present invention;

[0009] Fig. 2 is a block diagram of the control system of Fig. 1 showing selected aspects of the control system in greater detail;

[0010] Fig. 3. is a simplified block diagram of the control system of Figs. 1-2;

[0011] Fig. 4 is a flowchart showing the operation of the control system of Fig. 3 to turn on an output device in response to an operator input;

[0012] Fig. 5 is a flowchart showing the operation of the control system of Fig. 3 to turn off an output device in response to the failure of an interlock condition;

[0013] Fig. 6 is another simplified block diagram of the control system of Figs. 1-2;

[0014] Fig. 7 is a flowchart showing the operation of the control system of Fig. 6 to implement load management when battery voltage decreases;

[0015] Fig. 8 is a flowchart showing the operation of the control system of Fig. 6 to restore power to output devices that have been shed during the load management illustrated in Fig. 7;

[0016] Fig. 9 is another simplified block diagram of the control system of Figs. 1-2;

[0017] Figs. 10A-10B are flowcharts showing the operation of the control system of Fig. 9 to implement load sequencing in response to an operator input;

[0018] Figs. 11A-11B are flowcharts showing the operation of the control system of Fig. 9 to implement load sequencing in different orders depending on an operating mode of the fire truck;

[0019] Fig. 12 is a schematic view of an aerial device having a control system according to another embodiment of the present invention;

[0020] Fig. 13 is a more detailed block diagram of the control system of Fig. 12;

[0021] Fig. 14 is a schematic view of a military vehicle having a control system according to another embodiment of the present invention;

[0022] Figs. 15-16 are block diagrams of the control system of Fig. 14 showing selected aspects of the control system in greater detail, and Figs. 17A-17B are modified views of the block diagram of Fig. 16 showing the operation of the control system to reconfigure itself in a failure mode of operation;

[0023] Fig. 18 is a diagram showing the memory contents of an exemplary interface module in greater detail; and

[0024] Fig. 19 is truth table in which an output is controlled with an additional layer of failure management for inputs with undetermined states.

[0025] Fig. 20 is a block diagram of the control system of Fig. 14 showing selected aspects of the control system in greater detail;

[0026] Fig. 21 is an I/O status table of Fig. 20 shown in greater detail;

^{A1}
[0027] ~~Fig. 22 is a flowchart describing the operation of the control system of Fig. 20 in greater detail;~~

^{A2}
[0028] ~~Fig. 23 is a data flow diagram describing data flow through an exemplary interface module during the process of Fig. 22; and~~

[0029] ~~Fig. 24 is a flowchart describing the operation of the control system of Fig. 20 when an interface module has been rendered inoperable.~~

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

A. Fire Truck Control System

[0030] For convenience, the contents of U.S. Ser. No. 09/364,690, upon which priority is claimed, are repeated below. The remainder of U.S. Ser. No. 09/364,690 that is not repeated below is hereby incorporated by reference.

1. Architecture of Preferred Fire Truck Control System

[0031] Referring now to Fig. 1, a preferred embodiment of a fire truck 10 having a control system 12 is illustrated. By way of overview, the control system 12 comprises a central control unit 14, a plurality of microprocessor-based interface modules 20 and 30, a plurality of input devices 40 and a plurality of output devices 50. The central control unit 14 and the interface modules 20 and 30 are connected to each other by a communication network 60.

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[0032] More specifically, the central control unit 14 is a microprocessor-based device and includes a microprocessor 15 that executes a control program 16 (see Fig. 2) stored in memory of the central control unit 14. The control program is shown and described in greater detail below in conjunction with the flowcharts of Figs. 4, 5, 7, 8 and 10. In general, the control unit 14 executes the program to collect and store input status information from the input devices 40, and to control the output devices 50 based on the collected status information. The control program preferably implements an interlock system (e.g., Fig. 5), a load manager (e.g., Figs. 7-8), and a load sequencer (e.g., Figs. 10A-10B). As described below, the central control unit 14 is preferably not connected to the I/O devices 40 and 50 directly but rather only indirectly by way of the interface modules 20 and 30, thereby enabling distributed data collection and power distribution. The I/O devices 40 and 50 are located on a chassis 11 of the fire truck 10, which includes both the body and the underbody of the fire truck 10.

[0033] In the illustrated embodiment, two different types of interface modules are used. The interface modules 20 interface mainly with switches and low power indicators, such as LEDs that are integrally fabricated with a particular switch and that are used to provide visual feedback to an operator regarding the state of the particular switch. For this reason, the interface modules 20 are sometimes referred to herein as "SIMs" ("switch interface modules"). Herein, the reference numeral "20" is used to refer to the interface modules 20 collectively, whereas the reference numerals 21, 22 and 23 are used to refer to specific ones of the interface modules 20.

[0034] The interface modules 30 interface with the remaining I/O devices 40 and 50 on the vehicle that do not interface to the interface modules 20, and therefore are sometimes referred to herein as "VIMs" ("vehicle interface modules"). The interface modules 30 are distinguishable from the interface modules 20 mainly in that the interface modules 30 are capable of handling both analog and digital inputs and outputs, and in that they are capable of providing

more output power to drive devices such as gauges, valves, solenoids, vehicle lighting and so on. The analog outputs may be true analog outputs or they may be pulse width modulation outputs that are used to emulate analog outputs. Herein, the reference numeral "30" is used to refer to the interface modules 30 collectively, whereas the reference numerals 31, 32, 33, 34 and 35 are used to refer to specific ones of the interface modules 30.

[0035] Although two different types of interface modules are used in the illustrated embodiment, depending on the application, it may be desirable to use only a single type of interface module in order to reduce inventory requirements. Additionally, while in Fig. 1 three of the interface modules 20 and five of the interface modules 30 are shown, this arrangement is again simply one example. It may be desirable to provide each interface module with more I/O points in order to reduce the number of interface modules that are required, or to use more interface modules with a smaller number of I/O points in order to make the control system 12 more highly distributed. Of course, the number of interface modules will also be affected by the total number of I/O points in the control system.

[0036] Figure 1 shows an approximate distribution of the interface modules 20 and 30 throughout the fire truck 10. In general, in order to minimize wiring, the interface modules 20 and 30 are placed so as to be located as closely as possible to the input devices 40 from which input status information is received and the output devices 50 that are controlled. As shown in Fig. 1, there is a large concentration of interface modules 20 and 30 near the front of the fire truck 10, with an additional interface module 34 at mid-length of the fire truck 10 and another interface module 35 at the rear of the fire truck 10. The large concentration of interface modules 20 and 30 at the front of the fire truck 10 is caused by the large number of switches (including those with integral LED feedback output devices) located in a cab of the fire truck 10, as well as the large number of other output devices (gauges, lighting) which tend to be located in the cab or otherwise near the front of the fire truck 10. The

interface module 34 that is located in the middle of the truck is used in connection with I/O devices 40 and 50 that are located at the fire truck pump panel (i.e., the operator panel that has I/O devices for operator control of the fire truck's pump system). The interface module 35 that is located at the rear of the fire truck 10 is used in connection with lighting and other equipment at the rear of the fire truck 10.

[0037] The advantage of distributing the interface modules 20 and 30 in this manner can be more fully appreciated with reference to Fig. 2, which shows the interconnection of the interface modules 20 and 30. As shown in Fig. 2, the interface modules 20 and 30 receive power from a power source 100 by way of a power transmission link 103. The power transmission link 103 may comprise for example a single power line that is routed throughout the fire truck 10 to each of the interface modules 20 and 30. The interface modules then distribute the power to the output devices 50, which are more specifically designated with the reference numbers 51a, 52a, 53a, 54a-c, 55a-c, 56a-b, 57a-c and 58a-d in Fig. 2.

[0038] It is therefore seen from Figs. 1 and 2 that the relative distribution of the interface modules 20 and 30 throughout the fire truck 10 in combination with the arrangement of the power transmission link 103 allows the amount of wiring on the fire truck 10 to be dramatically reduced. The power source 100 delivers power to the interface modules 20 and 30, which act among other things as power distribution centers, and not directly to the output devices 50. Because the interface modules 20 and 30 are located so closely to the I/O devices 40 and 50, most of the I/O devices can be connected to the interface modules 20 and 30 using only a few feet of wire or less. This eliminates the need for a wire harness that extends the length of the fire truck (about forty feet) to establish connections for each I/O devices 40 and 50 individually.

[0039] Continuing to refer to Fig. 2, the switch interface modules 20 and the interconnection of the interface modules 20 with various I/O devices

will now be described in greater detail. The interface modules 20 are microprocessor-based, as previously noted, and include a microprocessor that executes a program to enable communication over the communication network 60, as detailed below.

[0040] The same or a different microprocessor of the interface modules 20 may also be used to process input signals received from the input devices 40. In particular, the interface modules 20 preferably perform debounce filtering of the switch inputs, so as to require that the position of the switch become mechanically stable before a switch transition is reported to the central control unit 14. For example, a delay of fifty milliseconds may be required before a switch transition is reported. Performing this filtering at the interface modules 20 reduces the amount of processing that is required by the central control unit 14 to interpret switch inputs, and also reduces the amount of communication that is required over the communication network 60 because each switch transition need not be reported.

[0041] Physically, the interface modules 20 may be placed near the headliner of a cab 17 of the fire truck 10. Traditionally, it is common practice to locate panels of switches along the headliner of the cab for easy access by an operator of the fire truck. Additionally, as detailed below, in the preferred embodiment, the interface modules 20 are connected to switches that have integrally fabricated LEDs for indicating the state of the output device controlled by the switch to provide maximum operator feedback. These LEDs are output devices which are connected to the interface modules 20. Therefore, by locating the interface modules near the headliner of the cab, the amount of wiring required to connect the interface modules 20 not only to the switches and but also to the LED indicators is reduced.

[0042] In the preferred embodiment, the interface modules 20 have between ten and twenty-five each of inputs and outputs and, more preferably, have sixteen digital (on/off switch) inputs and sixteen LED outputs. Most of these inputs and outputs are utilized in connection with switches having

integrally fabricated LEDs. However, it should be noted that there need not be a one-to-one correspondence between the switches and the LEDs, and that the inputs and the outputs of the interface modules 20 need not be in matched pairs. For example, some inputs may be digital sensors (without a corresponding output device) and some of the outputs may be ordinary digital indicators (without a corresponding input device). Additionally, the LED indicators associated with the switch inputs for the interface module 21 could just as easily be driven by the interface module 23 as by the interface module 21, although this arrangement is not preferred. Of course, it is not necessary that all of the inputs and outputs on a given interface module 20 be utilized and, in fact, it is likely that some will remain unutilized.

[0043] One way of establishing a dedicated link between the I/O devices 40 and 50 and the interface modules 20 is through the use of a simple hardwired link. Considering for example an input device which is a switch, one terminal of the switch may be connected (e.g., by way of a harness connector) to an input terminal of the interface module 20 and the other terminal of the switch may be tied high (bus voltage) or low (ground). Likewise, for an output device which is an LED, one terminal of the LED may be connected to an output terminal of the interface module 20 and the other terminal of the LED may again be tied high or low. Other dedicated links, such as RF links, could also be used.

[0044] To provide maximum operator feedback, the LEDs that are located with the switches have three states, namely, off, on, and blinking. The off state indicates that the switch is off and therefore that the device controlled by the switch is off. Conversely, the on state indicates that the switch is on and that the device controlled by the switch is on. The blinking state indicates that the control system 12 recognizes that a switch is on, but that the device which the switch controls is nevertheless off for some other reason (e.g., due to the failure of an interlock condition, or due to the operation of the load manager or load sequencer). Notably, the blinking LED feedback is made possible by the fact that the LEDs are controlled by the control unit 14

and not directly by the switches themselves, since the switches themselves do not necessarily know the output state of the devices they control.

[0045] A specific example will now be given of a preferred interconnection of the interface modules 21, 22, and 23 with a plurality of I/O devices 40 and 50. Many or all of the I/O devices 40 and 50 could be the same as those that have previously been used on fire trucks. Additionally, it should be noted that the example given below is just one example, and that a virtually unlimited number of configurations are possible. This is especially true since fire trucks tend to be sold one or two at a time and therefore each fire truck that is sold tends to be unique at least in some respects.

[0046] In Fig. 2, the interface module 21 receives inputs from switches 41a that control the emergency lighting system of the fire truck. As previously noted, the emergency lighting system includes the flashing emergency lights (usually red and white) that are commonly associated with fire trucks and that are used to alert other motorists to the presence of the fire truck on the roadway or at the scene of a fire. One of the switches 41a may be an emergency master on/off (E-master) switch used to initiate load sequencing, as described in greater detail below. The interface module 21 may also be connected, for example, to switches 41b that control the emergency siren and horn. The interface module 21 is also connected to LEDs 51a that are integrally located in the switches 41a and 41b and that provide operator feedback regarding the positions of the switches 41a and 41b, as previously described.

[0047] The interface module 22 receives inputs from switches 42a that control lighting around the perimeter of the fire truck 10, switches 42b that control scene lighting, and switches 42c that control lighting which aids the operators in viewing gauges and other settings at the pump panel. The interface module 22 is also connected to LEDs 52a that are integrally located in the switches 42a, 42b and 42c and that provide operator feedback regarding the positions of the switches 42a, 42b and 42c.

[0048] The interface module 23 receives inputs from switches 43a that control heating and air conditioning, and switches 43b that controls miscellaneous other electrical devices. The interface module 23 is connected to LED indicators, some of which may be integrally located with the switches 43a and 43b and others of which may simply be an LED indicator that is mounted on the dashboard or elsewhere in the cab of the fire truck 10.

[0049] Continuing to refer to Fig. 2, the vehicle interface modules 30 and the interconnection of the interface modules 20 with various I/O devices will now be described in greater detail. As previously mentioned, the interface modules 30 are distinguishable from the interface modules 20 mainly in that the interface modules 30 are capable of handling both analog and digital inputs and outputs, and in that they are capable of providing more output power to drive output devices such as digitally-driven gauges, solenoids, and so on. The interface modules 30 preferably have between fifteen and twenty-five each inputs and outputs and, more preferably, have twenty inputs (including six digital inputs, two frequency counter inputs, and six analog inputs) and twenty outputs (including six outputs that are configurable as analog outputs).

[0050] Like the interface modules 20, the interface modules 30 are microprocessor-based and include a microprocessor that executes a program to enable communication over the communication network 60. The same or a different microprocessor of the interface modules 30 may also be used to process input signals received from the input devices 40 and to process output signals transmitted to the output devices 50.

[0051] For the interface modules 30, this processing includes not only debounce filtering, in the case of switch inputs, but also a variety of other types of processing. For example, for analog inputs, this processing includes any processing that is required to interpret the inputs from analog-to-digital (A/D) converters, including converting units. For frequency inputs, this processing includes any processing that is required to interpret inputs from frequency-to-digital converters, including converting units. This processing also includes other

simple filtering operations. For example, in connection with one analog input, this processing may include notifying the central control unit 14 of the status of an input device only every second or so. In connection with another analog input, this processing may include advising the central control unit 14 only when the status of the input device changes by a predetermined amount. For analog output devices, this processing includes any processing that is required to interpret the outputs for digital-to-analog (D/A) converters, including converting units. For digital output devices that blink or flash, this processing includes implementing the blinking or flashing (i.e., turning the output device on and off at a predetermined frequency) based on an instruction from the central control unit 14 that the output device should blink or flash. In general, the processing by the interface modules 30 reduces the amount of information which must be communicated over the communication link, and also reduces the amount of time that the central control unit 14 must spend processing minor changes in analog input status.

[0052] Preferably, the configuration information required to implement the I/O processing that has just been described is downloaded from the central control unit 14 to each interface module 30 (and each interface module 20) at power-up. Additionally, the harness connector that connects to each of the interface modules 20 and 30 are preferably electronically keyed, such that being connected to a particular harness connector provides the interface modules 20 and 30 with a unique identification code (for example, by tying various connector pins high and low to implement a binary code). The advantage of this approach is that the interface modules 20 and 30 become interchangeable devices that are customized only at power-up. As a result, if one of the interface modules 30 malfunctions, for example, a new interface module 30 can be plugged into the control system 12, customized automatically at power-up (without user involvement), and the control system 12 then becomes fully operational. This enhances the maintainability of the control system 12.

[0053] A specific example will now be given of a preferred interconnection of the interface modules 31, 32, and 33 with a plurality of I/O devices 40 and 50. This example continues the example that was started in connection with the interface modules 21, 22, and 23. Again, it should be noted that the configuration described herein is just one example.

[0054] The interface modules 31, 32, 33, 34 and 35 all receive inputs from additional switches and sensors 44a, 45a, 46a, 47a and 48a. The switches may be additional switches that are located in the cab of the fire truck or elsewhere throughout the vehicle, depending on the location of the interface module. The sensors may be selected ones of a variety of sensors that are located throughout the fire truck. The sensors may be used to sense the mechanical status of devices on the fire truck, for example, whether particular devices are engaged or disengaged, whether particular devices are deployed, whether particular doors on the fire truck are open or closed, and so on. The sensors may also be used to sense fluid levels such as fuel level, transmission fluid level, coolant level, foam pressure, oil level, and so on.

[0055] In addition to the switches and sensors 44a, the interface module 31 is also connected to a portion 54a of the emergency lighting system. The emergency lighting system includes emergency lights (usually red and white) at the front, side and rear of the fire truck 10. The emergency lights may, for example, be in accordance with the guidelines provided by the National Fire Protection Association. Because the interface module 31 is located at the front of the fire truck, the interface module 31 is connected to the red and white emergency lights at the front of the fire truck.

[0056] The interface module 31 is also connected to gauges and indicators 54b which are located on the dashboard of the fire truck 10. The gauges may indicate fluid levels such as fuel level, transmission fluid level, coolant level, foam pressure, oil level and so on. The indicators may include, for example, indicators that are used to display danger, warning and caution messages, warning lights, and indicators that indicate the status of various

mechanical and electrical systems on the fire truck. The interface module 31 may also be connected, for example, to an emergency sound system including an emergency siren and emergency air horns 54c, which are used in combination with the emergency lights 54a.

[0057] In addition to the switches and sensors 45a, the interface module 32 is also connected to perimeter lighting 55a, scene lighting 55b and utility lighting 55c. The perimeter lighting 55a illuminates the perimeter of the fire truck 10. The scene lighting 55b includes bright flood lights and/or spot lights to illuminate the work area at a fire. The utility lighting 55c includes lighting used to light operator panels, compartments and so on of the fire truck 10.

[0058] In addition to the switches and sensors 46a, the interface module 33 is also connected to PTO sensors 46b. The PTO sensors 46b monitor the status of a power take-off mechanism 97 (see Fig. 1), which diverts mechanical power from the engine/transmission from the wheels to other mechanical subsystems, such as the pump system, an aerial system and so on. The interface module 33 is also connected to a portion 56a of the FMVSS (Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard) lighting. The FMVSS lighting system includes the usual types of lighting systems that are commonly found on most types of vehicles, for example, head lights, tail lights, brake lights, directional lights (including left and right directionals), hazard lights, and so on. The interface module 33 is also connected to the heating and air conditioning 56b.

[0059] In addition to the switches and sensors 47a, the interface module 34, which is disposed near the pump panel, is connected to pump panel switches and sensors 47a, pump panel gauges and indicators 57a, pump panel lighting 57b, and perimeter lighting 57c. The pump system may be manually controlled or may be automatically controlled through the use of electronically controlled valves. In either case, the various fluid pressures are measured by sensors and displayed on the gauges and indicators 57a.

[0060] Finally, in addition to the switches and sensors 48a, the interface module 35 is also connected to emergency lighting 58a, scene lighting 58b, FMVSS lighting 58c, and the utility lighting 58d. These lighting systems have been described above.

[0061] The interface modules 20 and the interface modules 30 are connected to the central control unit 14 by the communication network 60. The communication network may be implemented using a network protocol, for example, which is in compliance with the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) J1708/1587 and/or J1939 standards. The particular network protocol that is utilized is not critical, although all of the devices on the network should be able to communicate effectively and reliably.

[0062] The transmission medium may be implemented using copper or fiber optic cable. Fiber optic cable is particularly advantageous in connection with fire trucks because fiber optic cable is substantially immune to electromagnetic interference, for example, from communication antennae on mobile news vehicles, which are common at the scenes of fires. Additionally, fiber optic cable is advantageous because it reduces RF emissions and the possibility of short circuits as compared to copper-based networks. Finally, fiber optic cable is advantageous because it reduces the possibility of electrocution as compared to copper in the event that the cable accidentally comes into contact with power lines at the scene of a fire.

[0063] Also connected to the communication network 60 are a plurality of displays 81 and 82. The displays 81 and 82 permit any of the data collected by the central control unit 14 to be displayed to the firefighters in real time. In practice, the data displayed by the displays 81 and 82 may be displayed in the form of text messages and may be organized into screens of data (given that there is too much data to display at one time) and the displays 81 and 82 may include membrane pushbuttons that allow the firefighters to scroll through, page through, or otherwise view the screens of data that are available. Additionally, although the displays 81 and 82 are both capable of displaying any

of the information collected by the central control unit 14, in practice, the displays 81 and 82 are likely to be used only to display selected categories of information. For example, assuming the display 81 is located in the cab and the display 82 is located at the pump panel, the display 81 is likely to be used to display information that pertains to devices which are controlled from within the cab, whereas the display 82 is likely to be used to display information pertaining to the operation of the pump panel. Advantageously, the displays 81 and 82 give firefighters instant access to fire truck information at a single location, which facilitates both normal operations of the fire truck as well as troubleshooting if problems arise.

[0064] Also shown in Fig. 2 is a personal computer 85 which is connected to the control unit 14 by way of a communication link 86, which may be a modem link, an RS-232 link, an internet link, and so on. The personal computer 85 allows diagnostic software to be utilized for remote or local troubleshooting of the control system 12, for example, through direct examination of inputs, direct control of outputs, and viewing and controlling internal states, including interlock states. Because all I/O status information is stored in the central control unit 14, this information can be easily accessed and manipulated by the personal computer 85. If a problem is encountered, the personal computer can be used to determine whether the central control unit 14 considers all of the interface modules 20 and 30 to be "on-line" and, if not, the operator can check for bad connections and so on. If a particular output device is not working properly, the personal computer 85 can be used to trace the I/O status information from the switch or other input device through to the malfunctioning output device. For example, the personal computer 85 can be used to determine whether the switch state is being read properly, whether all interlock conditions are met, and so on.

[0065] The personal computer 85 also allows new firmware to be downloaded to the control unit 14 remotely (e.g., from a different city or state by way of the internet or a telephone link) by way of the communication

link 86. The firmware can be firmware for the control unit 14, or it can be firmware for the interface modules 20 and 30 that is downloaded to the control unit 14 and then transmitted to the interface modules 20 and 30 by way of the communication network 60.

[0066] Finally, referring back to Fig. 1, several additional systems are shown which will now be briefly described before proceeding to a discussion of the operation of the control system 12. In particular, Fig. 1 shows an engine system including an engine 91 and an engine control system 92, a transmission system including a transmission 93 and a transmission control system 94, and an anti-lock brake system including an anti-lock brake control system 95 and anti-lock brakes 96. The transmission 93 is mechanically coupled to the engine 91, and is itself further mechanically coupled to a PTO system 97. The PTO system 97 allows mechanical power from the engine to be diverted to water pumps, aerial drive mechanisms, stabilizer drive mechanisms, and so on. In combination, the engine system, the transmission system and the PTO system form the power train of the fire truck 10.

[0067] The control systems 92, 94 and 95 may be connected to the central control unit 14 using the same or a different communication network than is used by the interface modules 30 and 40. In practice, the control systems 92, 94 and 95 are likely to be purchased as off-the-shelf systems, since most fire truck manufacturers purchase rather than manufacture engine systems, transmission systems and anti-lock brake systems. As a result, it is likely that the control systems 92, 94 and 95 will use a variety of different communication protocols and therefore that at least one additional communication network will be required.

[0068] By connecting the systems 92, 94 and 95 to the central control unit 14, an array of additional input status information becomes available to the control system 12. For example, for the engine, this allows the central control unit 14 to obtain I/O status information pertaining to engine speed, engine hours, oil temperature, oil pressure, oil level, coolant level, fuel level, and

so on. For the transmission, this allows the central control unit 14 to obtain, for example, information pertaining transmission temperature, transmission fluid level and/or transmission state (1st gear, 2nd gear, and so on). Assuming that an off-the-shelf engine or transmission system is used, the information that is available depends on the manufacturer of the system and the information that they have chosen to make available.

[0069] Connecting the systems 92, 94 and 95 to the central control unit 14 is advantageous because it allows information from these subsystems to be displayed to firefighters using the displays 81 and 82. This also allows the central control unit 14 to implement various interlock conditions as a function of the state of the transmission, engine or brake systems. For example, in order to turn on the pump system (which is mechanically driven by the engine and the transmission), an interlock condition may be implemented that requires that the transmission be in neutral or 4th lockup (i.e., fourth gear with the torque converter locked up), so that the pump can only be engaged when the wheels are disengaged from the power train. The status information from these systems can therefore be treated in the same manner as I/O status information from any other discrete I/O device on the fire truck 10. It may also be desirable to provide the central control unit 14 with a limited degree of control over the engine and transmission systems, for example, enabling the central control unit 14 to issue throttle command requests to the engine control system 91. This allows the central control unit to control the speed of the engine and therefore the voltage developed across the alternator that forms part of the power source 100.

2. Manner of Operation of Preferred Fire Truck Control System

[0070] The operation of the control system 12 will now be described in greater detail, including the manner in which interlock control, load management, and load sequencing are implemented by the control system 12.

a. **Operation Overview and Interlock Control**

[0071] Referring now to Figs. 3-5, a first example of the operation of the control system 12 is given. Figure 3 is a block diagram of the control system 12, which has been simplified to the extent that some of the structure shown in Figs. 1-2 is not shown in Fig. 3. Additionally, Fig. 3 shows in greater detail a switch 341 (which is one of the switches 41a in Fig. 2), rear scene lights 351 (which are part of the rear scene lighting 58b in Fig. 2), and an LED indicator 352 (which is one of the switch LED feedback indicators 51a in Fig. 2). The rear scene lights 351 are considered a single output device since they are both connected to one output of the interface module 35, even though there are in fact two lights. Finally, the central control unit 14 is also shown to include an interlock system 316, which is implemented in the control program 16 executed by the microprocessor 15.

[0072] Figure 4 is a flowchart showing the operation of the control system 12 to activate the rear scene lights 351 in response to an input signal received from the switch 341. One of the advantages of the control system 12 is that input signals from the input devices 40 are processed by the control unit 14 and do not directly control the output devices 50. Switches represent user input commands but do not close the electrical circuit between the power source 100 and the output device controlled by the switch. As will be described below, this simplifies control system wiring and makes possible more flexible control of output devices.

[0073] In order to highlight this aspect of the control system 12, it will be assumed that the switch 341 is a soft toggle switch. Thus, the switch 341 is physically a momentary switch, i.e., a switch that closes when pressed but, when pressure is removed, automatically returns to an open position. The control system 12 makes the switch 341 emulate a latched switch, i.e., a switch that remains closed when pressed and returns to an open position only when pressed again.

[0074] First, in step 401, the switch 341 transmits an input signal to the interface module 21. The input signal is transmitted to the interface module 21 as a result of a change in the status of the switch, for example, when an operator presses the switch. The input signal from the switch 341 is transmitted to the interface module 21 by way of a hardwired communication link 101 which may, for example, comprise a wire that connects a terminal of the switch 341 to an input terminal of the interface module 21 (with the other terminal of the switch 341 being tied high or low). Other types of dedicated links may also be used.

[0075] At step 402, the interface module 21 processes the input signal. For the switch 341, the interface module performs debounce filtering, for example, by waiting until the mechanical position of the switch stabilizes (e.g., fifty milliseconds) before transmitting the input signal to the control unit 14.

[0076] At step 403, the interface module 21 transmits the input signal in the form of a network message to the control unit 14 ("ECU" in Fig. 4). The network message is sent by way of the communication network 60 and, in particular, by way of a network communication link 61 that links the interface module 21 to the control unit 14.

[0077] At step 404, the control unit 14 processes the input signal. As previously noted, the switch 341 is physically a momentary switch (i.e., a switch that closes when pressed but, when pressure is removed, automatically returns to an open position) but is made to emulate a latched switch (i.e., a switch that remains closed when pressed and returns to an open position only when pressed again). Accordingly, to process the input signal, the control unit 14 first determines that the switch 341 has experienced an off→on transition (i.e., because the switch 341 was previously off but is now on), and then determines that the present state of the rear scene lights 351 are off. Accordingly, at step 405, the control unit 14 generates a first control signal to turn on the rear scene lights 351, as well as a second control signal to turn on LED indicator 352.

[0078] At step 406, the control unit 14 transmits the first control signal in the form of a second network message to the interface module 35. The network message is sent by way of the communication network 60 and, in particular, by way of a network communication link 65 that links the central control unit 14 to the interface module 35. In practice, the network communication link 65 may utilize some or all of the same physical media utilized by the network communication link 61, depending on the network architecture that is utilized. In the illustrated embodiment a bus architecture is utilized, but it should be understood of course that other types of network architectures (such as ring or star architectures) may also be utilized.

[0079] At step 407, the interface module 35 transmits the first control signal to the rear lighting system 351. The control signal is transmitted in the form of a power control signal on a hardwired communication link 105. The hardwired communication link 105 may, for example, comprise a wire that connects a terminal of the switch 341 to an input terminal of the interface module 21. The power control signal from the interface module 35 has two states, namely, an "on" state in which power is provided to the lighting system 351 and an "off" in which power is not provided to the lighting system 351.

[0080] At step 408, the control unit 14 transmits the second control signal to the interface module 21 by way of the network communication link 61 in the form of a third network message. At step 409, the interface module 21 transmits the second control signal to the LED indicator 352 in the form of a power control signal on a hardwired communication link 102. As previously noted, the LED indicator 352 is located integrally with the switch 341 (e.g., at the tip of the lever of the switch 341, in a manner such that the LED is clearly associated with the switch 341). Therefore, when the second control signal is transmitted to the LED indicator 352, thereby turning on the LED indicator 352, the LED indicator provides feedback to the operator regarding the status of the rear scene lights 351. In the present situation, the on state of the LED indicator 352 indicates that the rear scene lights 351 are on.

[0081] When the switch 341 is released, another input signal (not shown) is sent to the interface unit 21 which indicates that the input state of the switch has changed from on to off. The control unit 14 recognizes the on→off transition, but ignores the transition pursuant to making the switch 341 emulate a latched switch.

[0082] It may be noted therefore that the switch 341 does not complete the electrical power circuit for the rear scene lights 351. When the switch 341 is released, the switch 341 opens but this change does not cause any change in the output status of the scene lights 351. The opportunity for the central control unit 14 to process the input signal from the switch 341 (as well as other input devices) makes the control system 12 more flexible and robust while at the same time reducing wiring and therefore reducing the number of failure points.

[0083] For example, a feature that is easily implemented in the control system 12 is two-way or, more generally, N-way switching. To implement N-way switching, it is only necessary to define N switches as inputs that control a given lighting system, and to program the control unit 14 to toggle the state of the lighting system every time the latched state of one of the N switches changes. A complicated and wiring-intensive N-way switching circuit is not required because the control logic required to implement N-way switching is not hardwired but rather is programmed into the control unit 14. Another feature that is easily implemented is progressive switching, in which the control unit 14 responds differently each time a given switch is pressed.

[0084] In addition to the advantages that are achieved due to the processing of the inputs, additional advantages are achieved in connection with processing the outputs. Thus, another advantage of the control system 12 is that the outputs are capable of multiple modes of operation, without any additional hardware, depending on the mode of operation of the vehicle. Thus, the same output device can have a digital mode of operation, an analog mode of operation, and a flashing mode of operation. For example, the same set of lights

can be made to operate as high beam headlights at night (digital), as day-time running lights during the day (analog), and as flashing white lights in an emergency situation. (This is especially true if analog outputs are implemented using pulse width modulation to emulate a true analog-type output.) Because specialized hardware for each mode of operation is not required, it is much easier to provide any given output device with the ability to operate in different modes.

[0085] Another advantage with respect to the processing of outputs is that the central control unit 14 has the ability to synchronize or desynchronize different output devices. For example, in connection with the flashing emergency lights, it is possible to more precisely control the emergency lights and to have different lights flashing with exactly the same frequency but at a different phase. This prevents multiple sets of lights from undesirably turning on at the same time. For fire trucks with circuit breakers, this situation is undesirable because it can cause the current draw of the multiple sets of lights to trip a circuit breaker, thereby rendering the flashing emergency lights inoperative altogether.

[0086] Referring now to Fig. 5, the operation of the control system 12 to disengage the rear scene lights 351 in response to a changed interlock condition is illustrated. Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) regulations prohibit the use of white lights on the back of a vehicle when the vehicle is moving forward. This regulation prevents other drivers from confusing the vehicle with oncoming traffic. Therefore, if a fire truck at the scene of a fire has white rear scene lights turned on and a firefighter decides to move the fire truck, the firefighter must first remember to turn off the white rear scene lights. Figure 5 illustrates the operation of the control system to implement an interlock system 316 that eliminates the need for the firefighter to have to remember to turn off the rear scene lights in this situation.

[0087] To implement this type of control, a sensor 342 that monitors the status of the parking brake is utilized. The control rules governing the

interlock condition for this example are then as follows. The rear scene lights 351 should disengage when the parking brake is disengaged. However, the rear scene lights are allowed to be on when the parking brake is off. Therefore, the rear scene lights are turned off only when there is an on→off transition of the parking brake and, otherwise, the rear scene lights are allowed to be on.

[0088] Accordingly, by way of example, the parking brake is turned off at step 501. At step 502, the parking brake sensor 342 transmits an input signal to the interface module 31. At step 503, the interface module 31 processes the input signal. For example, the interface module 31 performs debounce filtering to require stabilization of the mechanical state of the sensor before a state change is recognized.

[0089] At step 504, the interface module 31 transmits the input signal in the form of a network to the control unit 14 by way of a network communication link 67. At step 505, the control unit 14 processes the input signal. For example, the control unit 14 determines that the rear scene lights 351 are on, and that there has been an on→off transition in the state of the parking brake sensor 342. Accordingly, at step 506, the control unit 14 generates a first control signal to turn off the rear scene lights 351 and a second control signal to cause the LED indicator 352 to blink.

[0090] At step 507, the control unit 14 transmits the first control signal in the form of a network message to the interface module 35. In turn, at step 508, the interface module 35 transmits the control signal to the rear scene light lights 351, thereby causing the rear scene lights to turn off.

[0091] At step 509, the control unit 14 transmits the second control signal in the form of a network message to the interface module 21. In turn, at step 510, the interface module 35 transmits the control signal to the LED indicator 352, thereby causing the LED indicator 352 to blink. The blinking state of the LED indicator 352 indicates to the operator that the control unit 14 considers the switch 341 to be on, but that the rear scene lights 351 are nevertheless off because some other condition on the fire truck is not met. In this case, the rear

scene lights 351 are off due to the on→off transition in the state of the parking brake. In this way, operator feedback is maximized.

[0092] The flow chart of Fig. 4, at step 510, shows the use of a single control signal to cause the LED indicator 352 to blink. In practice, the blinking of the LED indicator 352 may be achieved in a variety of ways. For example, if a simple hardwired connection between the interface module 21 and the LED indicator 352 is utilized, the interface module 21 may periodically provide periodic on and off control signals to the LED indicator 352 by periodically applying power to the output terminal that is connected to the LED indicator 352. Alternatively, if a blinker module is utilized, the interface module may provide a single control signal to the blinker module, which then controls blinking of the LED indicator 352.

[0093] If the operator then pushes and releases the switch 341 a second time while the parking brake is off, the process in Fig. 4 is repeated and the rear scene lights 351 turn on. In this case, the rear scene lights 351 turn on even though the parking brake is off, because the control system 12 only prevents the rear scene lights from being on when the parking brake is first released. If the operator pushes and releases the switch 341 a third time, the control system 12 turns off the rear scene lights 351.

b. Load Management

[0094] Referring now to Figs. 6–8, a second example of the operation of the control system 12 is given. Figure 6 is another block diagram of the control system 12, which has been simplified to the extent that some of the structure shown in Figs. 1–2 is not shown in Fig. 6. Additionally, Fig. 6 shows a plurality of output devices 651, 652, 653 and 654 that have load management priority levels equal to one, two, three and four, respectively. The output devices 651, 652, 653 and 654 are exemplary ones of the output devices 50 of Figs. 1–2. Finally, the central control unit 14 is shown to include a load manager 616, which is implemented in the control program 16 executed by the microprocessor 15.

[0095] Because the output devices 651, 652, 653 and 654 are assigned four different load management priority levels, the load manager 616 is referred to as a four level load manager. As will become apparent, implementing a load manager with additional priority levels can be achieved simply by defining additional priority levels. Indeed, it is even possible for the load manager 616 to have the same number of levels as there are output devices, by assigning every output device a different priority level and by shedding the output devices one by one as the battery voltage drops.

[0096] Figure 7 is a flowchart showing the operation of the load manager 615. In particular, the flowchart of Fig. 7 describes the operation of the load manager 616 to turn off output devices in layers when the system voltage decreases. It may be noted that a similar approach may be used when the system voltage increases, in which case devices that are sensitive to over voltage conditions may be turned off in layers as the system voltage increases.

[0097] At step 701, the load manager initializes tracking variables and sets the active priority equal to zero. The active priority is the priority level that is currently shed. (In the described embodiment, the parameter N is typically equal to the active priority minus one. However, the parameter N could also simply be equal to the active priority.) Therefore, assuming that none of the output devices 651, 652, 653, 654 are shed, then the active priority level is equal to zero. The active priority increases as shedding occurs.

[0098] At step 702, the control unit 14 determines whether the battery voltage has decreased to the priority N load shed voltage. Initially, the tracking variable N is equal to one and so, initially, the control unit 14 is determining in step 702 whether the battery voltage has decreased enough for the first layer of shedding to occur. If the battery voltage has not decreased, then the control unit 14 continues to monitor the battery voltage until the priority 1 load shed voltage is reached.

[0099] At step 703, when the battery voltage has decreased to the priority 1 load shed voltage, then the control unit 14 starts a load shed

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timer. The purpose of the load shed timer is to ensure that a temporary reduction in the battery voltage (for example, caused by engagement of an output device that draws a significant amount of current) is not misinterpreted as the battery running out of power, so that the control unit 14 does not unnecessarily start shedding output devices.

[0100] The control unit 14 continues to monitor the battery voltage at step 704 until the load shed timer elapses at step 705. During this time, the control unit 14 continues to monitor whether the battery voltage is equal to or less than the priority 1 load shed voltage. If the battery returns above the load shed voltage, then that indicates only a temporary voltage reduction has occurred and therefore the process returns to step 702 after the active priority is set equal to N-1 at step 706. In this case, since N is equal to one, the active priority remains equal to zero, in other words, no output devices are shed.

[0101] If the battery voltage is still equal to or less than the priority 1 load shed voltage when the load shed timer elapses at step 705, then the process proceeds to step 707. At step 707, the control unit 14 determines whether any of the priority 1 output devices are active. If none of the priority 1 output devices 651 are active, then N is incremented by one, and the process proceeds to step 702. At step 702, the control unit 14 determines whether the battery voltage has decreased to the priority 2 load shed voltage. Thus, because the battery voltage is low, but there were no priority 1 output devices 651 to shed at step 707, the control unit determines whether it is appropriate to start shedding priority 2 output devices 652. The control unit 14 repeats the process and continues to search for a level of devices to shed until either the battery voltage is not low enough to justify shedding the next layer of devices (in which case the process proceeds to step 706, where the active priority is set equal to the highest level at which the battery voltage is low enough to cause shedding, if there were output devices to shed, and then the process returns to step 702) or until step 707 is answered affirmatively (in which case the process proceeds

to step 709, where the active priority is set equal to the priority level at which output devices are available for shedding, and then the process proceeds to step 710).

[0102] At step 710, these output devices are shed, the variable N is incremented, and the process proceeds to step 702 where the control unit 14 determines whether the battery voltage is less than the load shed voltage of the next priority level. The process then repeats until the battery voltage is greater than the load shed voltage of the next priority level.

[0103] When the active priority level becomes non-zero, the control unit 14 denies all requests for engagement of devices that have a priority level which is equal to or less than the active priority level. Thus, all devices that have a priority level which is equal to or less than the active priority level remain off, at least until the battery voltage increases and it becomes appropriate to restore some output devices, as described below in connection with Fig. 8.

[0104] As previously described, some output devices are controlled by switches that are integrally fabricated with an LED indicator. For such output devices, the control unit 14 causes the appropriate LED indicator to start blinking, thereby advising the operator that the switch is recognized by the control unit 14 as being turned on, but that the associated output device is nevertheless disengaged because it is being load managed. The process of making indicator LEDs blink was described previously in connection with Fig. 4.

[0105] Referring now to Fig. 8, a process for restoring power to output devices is illustrated. The battery is connected to the alternator and, if loading is reduced enough, the battery will begin to regain voltage. Therefore, it may become appropriate to restore power to at least some output devices. The process shown in Fig 8 for restoring power is essentially the opposite of the process shown in Fig. 7. The process of Fig. 8 may be performed in time alternating fashion with respect to the process of Fig. 7.

[0106] In particular, at step 801, it is determined whether the battery voltage has increased to the priority N load restore voltage. For example, if the active priority is currently set equal to three, then step 801 determines whether the battery voltage is greater than or equal to the priority 3 load restore voltage. The priority 3 load restore voltage is preferably larger than the priority 3 load shed voltage in order to implement a hysteresis effect that avoids output devices from flickering on and off.

[0107] At step 802, when the battery voltage has increased to the priority 3 load restore voltage, then the control unit 14 starts a load restore timer. The purpose of the load restore timer is to ensure that a temporary voltage surge is not misinterpreted as the battery regaining power, so that the control unit 14 does not inappropriately start restoring output devices.

[0108] The control unit continues to monitor the battery voltage at step 803 until the load restore timer elapses at step 804. During this time, the control unit 14 continues to monitor whether the battery voltage is still equal to or greater than the priority 3 load shed voltage. If the battery returns below the load restore voltage, then that indicates only a temporary voltage surge and therefore the process returns to step 801 after the active priority is set equal to N-1 at step 805. In this case, since N is equal to four (N is always one greater than the active priority in the described embodiment), the active priority remains equal to three, in other words, no output devices are restored.

[0109] If the battery voltage is still equal to or greater than the priority 3 load restore voltage at step 804, then the process proceeds to step 806. At step 806, the control unit 14 determines whether any of the priority 3 output devices 653 are inactive. If none of the priority 3 output devices are inactive, then N is decremented by one, and the process proceeds to step 801. At step 801, the control unit 14 determines whether the battery voltage has increased to the priority 2 load restore voltage. Thus, because the battery voltage has increased, but there were no priority 3 output devices 653 to restore at step 806, the control unit determines whether it is appropriate to start

restoring priority 2 output devices 652. The control unit 14 continues to search for a level of devices to restore until either the battery voltage is not high enough to justify restoring the next layer of devices (in which case the process proceeds to step 805, where the active priority is set equal to the highest level at which the battery voltage is high enough to permit restoring, if there were output devices to restore, and then the process returns to step 801) or until step 806 is answered affirmatively (in which case process proceeds to step 808, where the active priority is set equal to the priority level at which output devices are available for restoring, and then the process proceeds to step 809).

[0110] At step 809, these output devices are restored, the variable N is decremented, and the process proceeds to step 702 where the control unit 14 determines whether the battery voltage is greater than the load restore voltage of the next priority level. The process then continues until the battery voltage is less than the load restore voltage of the next priority level, or until all devices have been restored. Once a level of output devices has been restored, the control unit 14 starts accepting requests to turn on output devices having the restored priority level.

[0111] The implementation of the load manager 616 in the control unit 14 permits a high degree of flexibility to be obtained. For example, the priority level of output devices can be changed without requiring any hardware changes. For example, air conditioning might be given a higher priority in summer, when air conditioning is more critical for cooling off firefighters that have been inside a burning building, and less of a priority in winter when the outside temperature may be below freezing.

[0112] Further, the priority of the output devices can change dynamically as a function of the operating mode of the fire truck. Thus, in Fig. 6, the output device 658 is illustrated as having a priority X. The variable X may be set equal to one value for most operating conditions. However, upon receiving a request for the output device 658, the central control unit can review the I/O state of the fire truck and, if predetermined I/O conditions are

met, give the output device 658 a higher load management priority level, thereby allowing the output device 658 to turn on. Because the load management priority level is a software-assigned value, and is not hardwired by relay logic, it is possible to change the load management priority level of output devices dynamically while the fire truck is operating at the scene of a fire..

[0113] An additional advantage of the control system 12 is that it is more flexible and allows a higher level of load management granularity to be achieved. With the control system 12, it is possible to shed individual output devices instead of just groups of devices. For example, it is possible to shed individual lights within a lighting system without turning off the whole lighting system.

[0114] Another advantage of the control system 12 is that it can be given the ability to predict operational requirements of the fire truck, such that potential operational difficulties can be avoided. For example, with the load manager 616, the battery current draw may be monitored and very low priority loads may be preemptively shed in order to slow down or prevent the loss of battery power.

[0115] Another advantage of the control system 12 is that can be given the ability to perform prognoses of various system conditions and use the information obtained to alleviate or prevent operational difficulties. For example, the load manager 616 can predict, based on a knowledge of how much battery current is being drawn, how long the battery will last until it is necessary to start shedding output devices. Other examples also exist. For example, water flow from an on-board water supply can be monitored and the amount of time remaining until water is depleted can be displayed to an operator of the fire truck 10. This allows firefighters to know with greater accuracy how quickly they need to get the fire truck connected to a fire hydrant before the water supply is depleted. Similarly, for oxygen masks used in the basket of an aerial, oxygen flow can be monitored and the amount of time remaining until oxygen is depleted can be displayed to an operator of the fire truck. Again, this

allows firefighters to know with greater accuracy how quickly the oxygen supply should be replenished. Although conventionally, fire trucks have level indicators that indicate the amount of water or oxygen remaining, firefighters are generally more concerned about the amount of time remaining rather than the absolute quantity of water/oxygen remaining. This is especially true since the water and oxygen flow rates can vary significantly during the operation of the fire truck.

c. Load Sequencing

[0116] Referring now to Figs. 9, 10A, and 10B, a second example of the operation of the control system 12 is given. Figure 9 is another block diagram of the control system 12, which has been simplified to the extent that some of the structure shown in Figs. 1-2 is not shown in Fig. 9. Additionally, Fig. 6 shows a plurality of switches 941-45, a plurality of emergency lighting subsystems 951-54, and a plurality of LED indicators 955-59. The central control unit 14 includes a load sequencer 916, which is implemented in the control program 16 executed by the microprocessor 15.

[0117] In Figs. 9, 10A and 10B, the operation of the load sequencer is described with respect to four emergency lighting subsystems 951-59. It may be noted that the load sequencer may be used in other situations to control other output devices. For example, another load sequencer may be used when battery power is first applied, and another when the ignition is first turned on.

[0118] The lighting subsystems 951-59 may each, for example, comprise one emergency light or a set of emergency lights that are coupled to an output of one of the interface modules 30. Additionally, while only four subsystems are shown, in practice the load sequencer may be used to control additional emergency lighting subsystems.

[0119] The switches 941, 942, 943 and 944 respectively control the emergency lights 951, 952, 953 and 954. The remaining switch 945 is the

E-master switch. For any given set of emergency lights, both the E-master switch and the respective switch 941-44 must be turned on. Initially, the previous active on/off states of the switches 941-44, which have been stored in non-volatile memory, are recalled. Then, when an emergency call is received, an operator activates the E-master switch 945.

[0120] At step 1001, E-master switch 945 transmits an input signal to the interface module 21. At step 1002, the interface module processes the input signal. At step 1003, the interface module 21 transmits the input signal in the form of a network message to the central control unit 14. At step 1004, the central control unit processes input signal.

[0121] At step 1005, the control unit causes blinking of the LED indicators 955-959 of the sequenced systems 951-954. In particular, the control unit transmits control signals (in the form of network messages) to the interface modules that are connected to the LED indicators 955-959, which in turn transmit the control signals to the LED indicators 955-959 themselves, in the manner previously described. The operation of the indicators 955-959 is the same as has previously been described, namely, the LED indicators 955-959 blink when the switches 941-44 are turned on but the lighting subsystems 951-954 are not turned on. As the subsystems 951-954 turn on one by one, so too do the led indicators 955-959. Accordingly, because the operation of the LED indicators 955-959 indicators is the same as has been described elsewhere, the operation of the LED indicators 955-959 will not be described further.

[0122] At step 1006, the central control unit generates first, second, third, fourth and fourth control signals. At step 1007, the central control unit 14 transmits the first control signal in the form of a network message to the interface module 35. At step 1008, the interface module 35 transmits the first control signal in the form of a power signal to the first emergency lighting subsystem 951.

[0123] The control unit 14 then transmits additional control signals at one-half second intervals. Thus, after a one-half second delay at step 1009, the

central control unit transmits the second control signal in the form a network message to the interface module 31 at step 1010. At step 1011, the interface module 31 then sends the second control signal in the form of a power signal to the second emergency lighting subsystem 952. After another one-half second delay at step 1012, the central control unit 14 transmits the third control signal in the form a network message to the interface module 34 at step 1013. At step 1014, the interface module 34 then sends the third control signal in the form of a power signal to the third emergency lighting subsystem 953. Finally, after another one-half second delay at step 1015, the central control unit 14 transmits the third control signal in the form a network message to the interface module 35 at step 1016. At step 1017, the interface module 35 then sends the second control signal in the form of a power signal to the fourth emergency lighting subsystem 954. As previously indicated in connection with step 510 of Fig. 5, there are a variety of ways in which the blinking/flushing of outputs can be achieved, using either only a single control signal or using a first control signal followed by multiple additional control signals.

[0124] Referring now to Figs. 11A and 11B, another advantage of the control system 12 is the flexibility of the load sequencer 916. Like the load manager 616, the load sequencer 916 can operate as a function of the operating mode of the fire truck. Thus, in Fig. 11A, the load sequencer 916 turns subsystems on in a first order (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th) in a first operating mode of the fire truck 10. In a different operating mode of the fire truck, a somewhat different group of subsystems is load sequenced and they are load sequenced in a different order (3rd, 1st, 5th, 4th, 7th, 8th). The two different modes of operation can be activated, for example by two different master on/off switches. In the context of emergency lighting systems, this arrangement is useful where it is desirable to have the emergency lighting subsystems load sequence differently depending on whether the fire truck is traveling from the fire station to the fire or vice versa.

[0125] As another example of load sequencing performed as a function of the operating mode of the truck, it may be noted that, because the control unit 14 knows the on/off states of all of the output devices 50, load sequencing can be performed taking into account the current on/off state of the output devices that are load sequenced. For example, if some output devices are already turned on, then the load sequencer 916 can immediately proceed to the next output device without wasting time turning on a device that is already turned on. This advantageously permits load sequencing to be performed more quickly.

3. Aerial Control

[0126] Referring now to Fig. 12, a preferred embodiment of a fire truck 1210 with an aerial 1211 having an aerial control system 1212 is illustrated. By way of overview, the control system 1212 comprises an aerial central control unit 1214, a plurality of microprocessor-based interface modules 1220, 1230 and 1235, a plurality of input devices 1240, and a plurality of output devices 1250. The central control unit 1214 and the interface modules 1220, 1230 and 1235 are connected to each other by a communication network 1260.

[0127] The control system 1212 is similar in most respect to the control system 12, with the primary difference being that the control system 1212 is used to control the output devices 1250 on the aerial 1211 based on input status information from the input devices 1240, rather than to control the output devices 50 on the chassis 11. The interface modules 1220 and 1230 may be identical to the interface modules 20 and 30, respectively, and the central control unit 1214 may be identical to the central control unit 14 except that a different control program is required in connection with the aerial 1211. Accordingly, the discussion above regarding the interconnection and operation of the interface modules 20 and 30 with the input devices 40 and output devices 50 applies equally to the central control unit 1214, except to the extent

that the control system 1212 is associated with the aerial 1211 and not with the chassis 11.

[0128] The aerial control system 1212 also includes the interface modules 1225-27, which are similar to the interface modules 20 and 30 except that different I/O counts are utilized. In the preferred embodiment, the interface modules 1225-27 have twenty-eight switch inputs (two of which are configurable as frequency inputs). As previously noted, rather than using several different types of interface modules, it may be desirable to use only a single type of interface module in order to reduce inventory requirements. Additionally, the number of interface modules and the I/O counts are simply one example of a configuration that may be utilized.

[0129] It is desirable to use a control system 1214 for the aerial 1211 which is separate from the control system 12 in order to provide a clear separation of function between systems associated with the aerial 1211 and systems associated with the chassis 11. Additionally, as a practical matter, many fire trucks are sold without aerials and therefore providing a separate aerial control system enables a higher level commonality with respect to fire trucks that have aerials and fire trucks that do not have aerials.

[0130] A specific example will now be given of a preferred interconnection of the interface modules with a plurality of output devices 1240 and 1250. The interface module 1221 receives inputs from switches 1241a which may include for example an aerial master switch that activates aerial electrical circuits, an aerial PTO switch that activates the transmission to provide rotational input power for the hydraulic pump, and a platform leveling switch that momentarily activates a platform (basket) level electrical circuit to level the basket relative to the current ground grade condition. The LED indicators 1251 provide visual feedback regarding the status of the inputs switches 1241a.

[0131] The interface modules 1225 and 1231 are located near a ground-level control station at a rear of the fire truck 10. The interface modules

1225 and 1231 receive inputs from switches 1242a and 1243a that include, for example, an auto level switch that activates a circuit to level the fire truck using the stabilizer jacks and an override switch that overrides circuits for emergency operation. The interface modules 1225 and 1231 may also receive inputs from an operator panel such as a stabilizer control panel 1242b, which includes switches that control the raising and lowering of front and rear stabilizer jacks, and the extending and retracting of front and rear stabilizer jacks. The stabilizer is an outrigger system which is deployed to prevent the fire truck from becoming unstable due to the deployment of an aerial system (e.g., an eighty-five foot extendable ladder). The interface module 1231 may drive outputs that are used to control deployment the stabilizer, which can be deployed anywhere between zero and five feet.

[0132] The interface modules 1226 and 1232 are located near a turn table 1218 at the rear of the fire truck 10. The interface modules may receive inputs from switches 1244a and 1245a, as well as switches that are part of an aerial control panel 1245b and are used to control the extension/retraction, raising/lowering, and rotation of the aerial 1211. The interface modules 1226 and 1232 drive outputs that control the extension/retraction, raising/lowering, and rotation of the aerial 1211, as well as LED indicators 1254b that provide operator feedback regarding the positions of switches and other I/O status information. The interface modules 1227 and 1233 are located in the basket of the aerial and provide duplicate control for the extension/retraction, raising/lowering, and rotation of the aerial.

[0133] Additional inputs and outputs 1251b may be used to establish a communication link between the control system 12 and the control system 1212. In other words, the digital on/off outputs of one control system can be connected to the switch inputs of the other control system, and vice versa. This provides for a mechanism of transferring I/O status information back and forth between the two control systems 1211 and 1212.

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[0134] The control system 1214 has complete motion control of the aerial 1211. To this end, the control program 1216 includes an envelope motion controller 1216a, load motion controller 1216b and interlock controller 1216c. Envelope motion control refers to monitoring the position of the aerial and preventing the aerial from colliding with the remainder of the fire truck 10, and otherwise preventing undesirable engagement of mechanical structures on the fire truck due to movement of the aerial. Envelope motion control is implemented based on the known dimensions of the aerial 1211 and the known dimensions and position of other fire truck structures relative to the aerial 1211 (e.g., the position and size of the cab 17 relative to the aerial 1211) and the position of the aerial 1211 (which is measured with feedback sensors 1244a and 1245a). The control system 1212 then disallows inputs that would cause the undesirable engagement of the aerial 1211 with other fire truck structures.

[0135] Load motion control refers to preventing the aerial from extending so far that the fire truck tips over due to unbalanced loading. Load motion control is implemented by using an appropriate sensor to measure the torque placed on the cylinder that mechanically couples the aerial 1211 to the remainder of the fire truck. Based on the torque and the known weight of the fire truck, it is determined when the fire truck is close to tipping, and warnings are provided to the operator by way of text messages and LED indicators.

[0136] Interlock control refers to implementing interlocks for aerial systems. For example, an interlock may be provided that require the parking brake be engaged before allowing the aerial to move, that require the stabilizers to be extended and set before moving the aerial 1211, that require that the aerial PTO be engaged before attempting to move the aerial, and so on.

[0137] Advantageously, therefore, the control system makes the operation of the aerial much safer. For example, with respect to load motion control, the control system 1212 automatically alerts firefighters if the extension of the aerial is close to causing the fire truck to tip over. Factors such as the number and weight of people in the basket 1219, the amount and weight of

equipment in the basket 1219, the extent to which the stabilizers are deployed, whether and to what extent water is flowing through aerial hoses, and so on, are taken into account automatically by the torque sensors associated with the cylinder that mounts the aerial to the fire truck. This eliminates the need for a firefighter to have to monitor these conditions manually, and makes it possible for the control system 1212 to alert an aerial operator to unsafe conditions, and puts less reliance on the operator to make sure that the aerial is operating under safe conditions.

4. Additional Aspects

[0138] From the foregoing description, a number advantages of the preferred fire truck control system are apparent. In general, the control system is easier to use, more flexible, more robust, and more reliable than existing fire truck control systems. In addition, because of these advantages, the control system also increases firefighter safety because the many of the functions that were previously performed by firefighters are performed automatically, and the control system also makes possible features that would otherwise be impossible or at least impractical. Therefore, firefighters are freed to focus on fighting fires.

[0139] The control system is easier to use because the control system provides a high level of cooperation between various vehicle subsystems. The control system can keep track of the mode of operation of the fire truck, and can control output devices based on the mode of operation. The functions that are performed on the fire truck are more fully integrated to provide a seamless control system, resulting in better performance.

[0140] For example, features such as load management and load sequencing are implemented in the control program executed by the central control unit. No additional hardware is required to implement load management and load sequencing. Therefore, if it is desired to change the order of load sequencing, all that is required is to modify the control program. It is also possible to have different load sequencing defined for different modes of operation of the vehicle with little or no increase in hardware. The manner in which load

management is performed can also be changed dynamically during the operation of the fire truck.

[0141] The control system is robust and can accept almost any new feature without changes in wiring. Switches are connected to a central control unit and not to outputs directly, and new features can be programmed into the control program executed by the central control unit. A system can be modified by adding a new switch to an existing interface module, or by modifying the function of an existing switch in the control program. Therefore, modifying a system that is already in use is easy because little or no wiring changes are required.

[0142] Additionally, because the control system has access to input status information from most or all of the input devices on the fire truck and has control over most or all of the output devices on the fire truck, a high level of cooperation between the various subsystems on the fire truck is possible. Features that require the cooperation of multiple subsystems are much easier to implement.

[0143] The fire truck is also easier to operate because there is improved operator feedback. Displays are provided which can be used to determine the I/O status of any piece of equipment on the vehicle, regardless of the location of the display. Additionally, the displays facilitate troubleshooting, because troubleshooting can be performed in real time at the scene of a fire when a problem is occurring. Troubleshooting is also facilitated by the fact that the displays are usable to display all of the I/O status information on the fire truck. There is no need for a firefighter to go to different locations on the fire truck to obtain required information. Troubleshooting is also facilitated by the provision of a central control unit which can be connected by modem to another computer. This allows the manufacturer to troubleshoot the fire truck as soon as problems arise.

[0144] LED indicators associated with switches also improve operator feedback. The LEDs indicate whether the switch is considered to be off or on, or whether the switch is considered to be on but the output device

controlled by the switch is nevertheless off due to some other condition on the fire truck.

[0145] Because the control system is easier to use, firefighter safety is enhanced. When a firefighter is fighting fires, the firefighter is able to more fully concentrate on fighting the fire and less on having to worry about the fire truck. To the extent that the control system accomplishes tasks that otherwise would have to be performed by the firefighter, this frees the firefighter to fight fires.

[0146] The control system is also more reliable and maintainable, in part because relay logic is replaced with logic implemented in a control program. The logic in the control program is much easier to troubleshoot, and troubleshooting can even occur remotely by modem. Also mechanical circuit breakers can be replaced with electronic control, thereby further reducing the number of mechanical failure points and making current control occur more seamlessly. The simplicity of the control system minimizes the number of potential failure points and therefore enhances reliability and maintainability.

[0147] The system is also more reliable and more maintainable because there is less wire. Wiring is utilized only to established dedicated links between input/output devices and the interface module to which they are connected. The control system uses distributed power distribution and data collecting. The interface modules are interconnected by a network communication link instead of a hardwired link, thereby reducing the amount of wiring on the fire truck. Most wiring is localized wiring between the I/O devices and a particular interface module.

[0148] Additionally, the interface modules are interchangeable units. In the disclosed embodiment, the interface modules 20 are interchangeable with each other, and the interface modules 30 are interchangeable with each other. If a greater degree of interchangeability is required, it is also possible to use only a single type of interface module. If the control system were also applied to other types of equipment service vehicles

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(e.g., snow removal vehicles, refuse handling vehicles, cement/concrete mixers, military vehicles such as those of the multipurpose modular type, on/off road severe duty equipment service vehicles, and so on), the interface modules would even be made interchangeable across platforms since each interface module views the outside world in terms of generic inputs and outputs, at least until configured by the central control unit. Because the interface modules are interchangeable, maintainability is enhanced. An interface module that begins to malfunction due to component defects may be replaced more easily. On power up, the central control unit downloads configuration information to the new interface unit, and the interface unit becomes fully operational. This enhances the maintainability of the control system.

[0149] Because the interface modules are microprocessor-based, the amount of processing required by the central control unit as well as the amount of communication that is necessary between the interface modules and the central control unit is reduced. The interface modules perform preprocessing of input signals and filter out less critical input signals and, as a result, the central control unit receives and responds to critical messages more quickly.

B. Military Vehicle Control System

[0150] Referring now to Fig. 14, a preferred embodiment of a military vehicle 1410 having a control system 1412 is illustrated. As previously indicated, the control system described above can be applied to other types of equipment service vehicles, such as military vehicles, because the interface modules view the outside world in terms of generic inputs and outputs. Most or all of the advantages described above in the context of firefighting vehicles are also applicable to military vehicles. As previously described, however, it is sometimes desirable in the context of military applications for the military vehicle control system to be able to operate at a maximum level of effectiveness when the vehicle is damaged by enemy fire, nearby explosions, and so on. In this situation, the control system 1412 preferably incorporates a number of additional

features, discussed below, that increase the effectiveness of the control system 1412 in these military applications.

[0151] By way of overview, the control system 1412 comprises a plurality of microprocessor-based interface modules 1420, a plurality of input and output devices 1440 and 1450 (see Fig. 15) that are connected to the interface modules 1420, and a communication network 1460 that interconnects the interface modules 1420. The control system 1412 preferably operates in the same manner as the control system 12 of Figs. 1-13, except to the extent that differences are outlined are below. A primary difference between the control system 12 and the control system 1412 is that the control system 1412 does not include a central control unit that is implemented by a single device fixed at one location. Rather, the control system 1412 includes a central control unit that is allowed to move from location to location by designating one of the interface modules 1420 as a "master" interface module and by further allowing the particular interface module that is the designated master interface module to change in response to system conditions. As will be detailed below, this feature allows the control system 1412 to operate at a maximum level of effectiveness when the military vehicle 1410 is damaged. Additional features that assist failure management are also included.

[0152] More specifically, in the illustrated embodiment, the control system 1412 is used in connection with a military vehicle 1410 which is a multipurpose modular military vehicle. As is known, a multipurpose modular vehicle comprises a chassis and a variant module that is capable of being mounted on the chassis, removed, and replaced with another variant module, thereby allowing the same chassis to be used for different types of vehicles with different types of functionality depending on which variant module is mounted to the chassis. In the illustrated embodiment, the military vehicle 1410 is a wrecker and includes a wrecker variant module 1413 mounted on a chassis (underbody) 1417 of the military vehicle 1410. The variant module 1413 is removable and replaceable with other types of variant modules, which may include a dump truck

variant, a water pump variant, a telephone variant, and so on. The I/O devices 1440 and 1450 used by the vehicle 1410 include devices that are the same as or similar to the non-fire truck specific I/O devices of Figs. 1-13 (i.e., those types of I/O devices that are generic to most types of vehicles), as well as I/O devices that are typically found on the specific type of variant module chosen (in Fig. 14, a wrecker variant).

[0153] The interface modules 1420 are constructed in generally the same manner as the interface modules 20 and 30 and each include a plurality of analog and digital inputs and outputs. The number and type of inputs and outputs may be the same, for example, as the vehicle interface modules 30. Preferably, as described in greater detail below, only a single type of interface module is utilized in order to increase the field serviceability of the control system 1412. Herein, the reference numeral 1420 is used to refer to the interface modules 1420 collectively, whereas the reference numerals 1421-1430 are used to refer to specific ones of the interface modules 1420. The interface modules are described in greater detail in connection with Figs. 15-18.

[0154] Also connected to the communication network 1460 are a plurality of displays 1481 and 1482 and a data logger 1485. The displays 1481 and 1482 permit any of the data collected by the control system 1412 to be displayed in real time, and also display warning messages. The displays 1481 and 1482 also include membrane pushbuttons that allow the operators to scroll through, page through, or otherwise view the screens of data that are available. The membrane pushbuttons may also allow operators to change values of parameters in the control system 1412. The data logger 1485 is used to store information regarding the operation of the military vehicle 1410. The data logger 1485 may also be used as a "black box recorder" to store information logged during a predetermined amount of time (e.g., thirty seconds) immediately prior to the occurrence of one or more trigger events (e.g., events indicating that the military vehicle 1410 has been damaged or rendered inoperative, such as when

an operational parameter such as an accelerometer threshold has been exceeded).

[0155] Finally, Fig. 14 shows an engine system including an engine 1491 and an engine control system 1492, a transmission system including a transmission 1493 and a transmission control system 1494, and an anti-lock brake system including an anti-lock brake control system 1495. These systems may be interconnected with the control system 1412 in generally the same manner as discussed above in connection with the engine 91, the engine control system 92, the transmission 93, the transmission control system 94, and the anti-lock brake system 95 of Fig. 1.

[0156] Referring now also to Fig. 15-18, the structure and interconnection of the interface modules 1420 is described in greater detail. Referring first to Fig. 15, the interconnection of the interface modules 1420 with a power source 1500 is described. The interface modules 1420 receive power from the power source 1500 by way of a power transmission link 1502. The interface modules 1420 are distributed throughout the military vehicle 1410, with some of the interface modules 1420 being located on the chassis 1417 and some of the interface modules 1420 being located on the variant module 1413.

[0157] The control system is subdivided into three control systems including a chassis control system 1511, a variant control system 1512, and an auxiliary control system 1513. The chassis control system 1511 includes the interface modules 1421-1425 and the I/O devices 1441 and 1451, which are all mounted on the chassis 1417. The variant control system 1512 includes the interface modules 1426-1428 and the I/O devices 1442 and 1452, which are all mounted on the variant module 1413. The auxiliary control system 1513 includes the interface modules 1429-1430 and the I/O devices 1443 and 1453, which may be mounted on either the chassis 1417 or the variant module 1413 or both.

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[0158] The auxiliary control system 1513 may, for example, be used to control a subsystem that is disposed on the variant module but that is likely to be the same or similar for all variant modules (e.g., a lighting subsystem that includes headlights, tail lights, brake lights, and blinkers). The inclusion of interface modules 1420 within a particular control system may also be performed based on location rather than functionality. For example, if the variant module 1413 has an aerial device, it may be desirable to have one control system for the chassis, one control system for the aerial device, and one control system for the remainder of the variant module. Additionally, although each interface module 1420 is shown as being associated with only one of the control systems 1511-1513, it is possible to have interface modules that are associated with more than one control system. It should also be noted that the number of sub-control systems, as well as the number of interface modules, is likely to vary depending on the application. For example, a mobile command vehicle is likely to have more control subsystems than a wrecker variant, given the large number of I/O devices usually found on mobile command vehicles.

[0159] The power transmission link 1502 may comprise a single power line that is routed throughout the military vehicle 1410 to each of the interface modules 1420, but preferably comprises redundant power lines. Again, in order to minimize wiring, the interface modules 1420 are placed so as to be located as closely as possible to the input devices 1440 from which input status information is received and the output devices 1450 that are controlled. This arrangement allows the previously-described advantages associated with distributed data collection and power distribution to be achieved. Dedicated communication links, which may for example be electric or photonic links, connect the interface modules 1421-1430 modules with respective ones of the I/O devices, as previously described.

[0160] Referring next to Fig. 16, the interconnection of the interface modules 1420 by way of the communication network 1460 is illustrated. As previously indicated, the control system 1412 is subdivided into

three control systems 1511, 1512 and 1513. In accordance with this arrangement, the communication network 1460 is likewise further subdivided into three communication networks 1661, 1662, and 1663. The communication network 1661 is associated with the chassis control system 1511 and interconnects the interface modules 1421-1425. The communication network 1662 is associated with the variant control system 1512 and interconnects the interface modules 1426-1428. The communication network 1663 is associated with the auxiliary control system 1513 and interconnects the interface modules 1429-1430. Communication between the control systems 1511-1513 occurs by way of interface modules that are connected to multiple ones of the networks 1661-1663. Advantageously, this arrangement also allows the interface modules to reconfigure themselves to communicate over another network in the event that part or all of their primary network is lost. For example, in Fig. 17A, when a portion of the communication network 1663 is lost, the interface module 1429 reconfigures itself to communicate with the interface module 1430 by way of the communication network 1662 and the interface module 1427.

[0161] In practice, each of the communication networks 1661-1663 may be formed of two or more communication networks to provide redundancy within each control system. Indeed, the connection of the various interface modules 1420 with different networks can be as complicated as necessary to obtain the desired level of redundancy. For simplicity, these potential additional levels of redundancy will be ignored in the discussion of Fig. 16 contained herein.

[0162] The communication networks 1661-1663 may be implemented in accordance with SAE J1708/1587 and/or J1939 standards, or some other network protocol, as previously described. The transmission medium is preferably fiber optic cable in order to reduce the amount of electromagnetic radiation that the military vehicle 1410 produces, therefore making the vehicle less detectable by the enemy. Fiber optic networks are also more robust to the

extent that a severed fiber optic cable is still usable to create two independent networks, at least with reduced functionality.

[0163] When the variant module 1413 is mounted on the chassis 1417, connecting the chassis control system 1511 and the variant control system 1512 is achieved simply through the use of two mating connectors 1681 and 1682 that include connections for one or more communication busses, power and ground. The chassis connector 1682 is also physically and functionally mateable with connectors for other variant modules, i.e., the chassis connector and the other variant connectors are not only capable of mating physically, but the mating also produces a workable vehicle system. A given set of switches or other control devices 1651 on the dash (see Fig. 14) may then operate differently depending on which variant is connected to the chassis. Advantageously, therefore, it is possible to provide a single interface between the chassis and the variant module (although multiple interfaces may also be provided for redundancy). This avoids the need for a separate connector on the chassis for each different type of variant module, along with the additional unutilized hardware and wiring, as has conventionally been the approach utilized.

[0164] Upon power up, the variant control system 1512 and the chassis control system 1511 exchange information that is of interest to each other. For example, the variant control system 1512 may communicate the variant type of the variant module 1413. Other parameters may also be communicated. For example, information about the weight distribution on the variant module 1413 may be passed along to the chassis control system 1511, so that the transmission shift schedule of the transmission 1493 can be adjusted in accordance with the weight of the variant module 1413, and so that a central tire inflation system can control the inflation of tires as a function of the weight distribution of the variant. Similarly, information about the chassis can be passed along to the variant. For example, where a variant module is capable of being used by multiple chassis with different engine sizes, engine

information can be communicated to a wrecker variant module so that the wrecker variant knows how much weight the chassis is capable of pulling. Thus, an initial exchange of information in this manner allows the operation of the chassis control system 1511 to be optimized in accordance with parameters of the variant module 1413, and vice versa.

[0165] It may also be noted that the advantages obtained for military variants can also be realized in connection with commercial variants. Thus, a blower module, a sweeper module, and a plow module could be provided for the same chassis. This would allow the chassis to be used for a sweeper in summer and a snow blower or snow plow in winter.

[0166] As shown in Fig. 16, each control system 1511-1513 includes an interface module that is designated "master" and another that is designated "deputy master." Thus, for example, the chassis control system 1511 includes a master interface module 1423 and a deputy master interface module 1422. Additional tiers of mastership may also be implemented in connection with the interface modules 1421, 1424 and 1425.

[0167] The interface modules 1420 are assigned their respective ranks in the tiers of mastership based on their respective locations on the military vehicle 1410. A harness connector at each respective location of the military vehicle 1410 connects a respective one of the interface modules 1420 to the remainder of the control system 1412. The harness connector is electronically keyed, such that being connected to a particular harness connector provides an interface module 1420 with a unique identification code or address M. For simplicity, the value M is assumed to be a value between 1 and N, where N is the total number of interface modules on the vehicle (M = 10 in the illustrated embodiment).

[0168] The interface modules 1420 each store configuration information that, among other things, relates particular network addresses with particular ranks of mastership. Thus, for example, when the interface module 1423 boots up, it ascertains its own network address and, based on its network

address, ascertains that it is the master of the control system 1511. The interface module 1423 serves as the central control unit so long as the interface module 1423 is competent to do so. As shown in Fig. 17B, if it is determined that the interface module 1423 is no longer competent to serve as master (e.g., because the interface module 1423 has been damaged in combat), then the interface module 1422 becomes the master interface module and begins serving as the central control unit. This decision can be made, for example, by the interface module 1423 itself, based on a vote taken by the remaining interface modules 1420, or based on a decision by the deputy master.

[0169] Referring next to Fig. 18, an exemplary one of the interface modules 1420 is shown in greater detail. The interface modules 1420 each include a microprocessor 1815 that is sufficiently powerful to allow each interface module to serve as the central control unit. The interface modules are identically programmed and each include a memory 1831 that further includes a program memory 1832 and a data memory 1834. The program memory 1832 includes BIOS (basic input/output system) firmware 1836, an operating system 1838, and application programs 1840, 1842 and 1844. The application programs include a chassis control program 1840, one or more variant control programs 1842, and an auxiliary control program 1844. The data memory 1834 includes configuration information 1846 and I/O status information 1848 for all of the modules 1420-1430 associated with the chassis 1417 and its variant module 1413, as well as configuration information for the interface modules (N + 1 to Z in Fig. 18) of other variant modules that are capable of being mounted to the chassis 1417.

[0170] It is therefore seen that all of the interface modules 1420 that are used on the chassis 1417 and its variant module 1413, as well as the interface modules 1420 of other variant modules that are capable of being mounted to the chassis 1417, are identically programmed and contain the same information. Each interface module 1420 then utilizes its network address to decide when booting up which configuration information to utilize when

configuring itself, and which portions of the application programs 1840-1844 to execute given its status as a master or non-master member of one of the control systems 1511-1513. The interface modules are both physically and functionally interchangeable because the interface modules are capable of being plugged in at any slot on the network, and are capable of performing any functions that are required at that slot on the network.

[0171] This arrangement is highly advantageous. Because all of the interface modules 1420 are identically programmed and store the same information, the interface modules are physically and functionally interchangeable within a given class of vehicles. Thus, if an interface module 1420 on one variant module is rendered inoperative, but the variant module is otherwise operational, the inoperative interface module can be replaced with an interface module scavenged from another inoperative vehicle. When the replacement interface module 1420 reboots, it will then reconfigure itself for use in the new vehicle, and begin operating the correct portions of the application programs 1840-1844. This is the case even when the two vehicles are different types of vehicles.

[0172] Additionally, if a highly critical interface module is rendered inoperable, the highly critical interface module can be swapped with an interface module that is less critical. Although the input/output devices associated with the less critical interface module will no longer be operable, the input/output devices associated with the more critical interface module will be operable. This allows the effectiveness of the military vehicle to be maximized by allowing undamaged interface modules to be utilized in the most optimal manner. In this way, the field serviceability of the control system 1412 is dramatically improved. Further, the field serviceability of the control system 1412 is also improved by the fact that only a single type of interface module is used, because the use of a single type of interface module makes it easier to find replacement interface modules.

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[0173] Additionally, as previously noted, each interface module 1420 stores I/O status information for all of the modules 1420-1430 associated with the chassis 1417 and its variant module 1413. Therefore, each interface module 1420 has total system awareness. As a result, it is possible to have each interface module 1420 process its own inputs and outputs based on the I/O status information in order to increase system responsiveness and in order to reduce the amount of communication that is required with the central control unit. The main management responsibility of the central control unit or master interface module above and beyond the responsibilities of all the other interface modules 1420 then becomes, for example, to provide a nexus for interface operations with devices that are external to the control system of which the central control unit is a part.

[0174] Referring now to Fig. 19, Fig. 19 is a truth table that describes the operation of the control system 1412 in the event of failure of one of the interface modules 1420 and/or one of the input devices 1440. The arrangement shown in Fig. 19 allows the control system 1412 to be able to continue to operate in the event of failure using a "best guess" method of controlling outputs.

[0175] In the example of Fig. 19, two output devices are controlled based on two input devices. For example, the first output device may be headlights of the military vehicle 1410, the first input device may be a combat switch or combat override switch that places the entire vehicle into a combat mode of operation, and the second input may be an operator switch for operator control of the headlights. The second output device is discussed further below. For simplicity, only the input states of two binary input devices are shown. In practice, of course, the control logic for most output devices will usually be a function of more input devices, in some cases ten or more input devices including analog input devices. Nevertheless, the simplified truth table of Fig. 19 is sufficient to obtain an understanding of this preferred aspect of the invention.

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[0176] The truth table of Fig. 19 shows a number of different possible input states and the corresponding output states. In the first two states, when the combat override switch (input #1) is off, then the headlights (output #1) are controlled as a function of the operator switch. Thus, if the operator switch is on, then the control system 1412 turns the headlights on, and if the operator switch is off, then the control system 1412 turns the headlights off. In the third and fourth input states, the combat override switch is on, and therefore the control system 1412 turns the headlights off in order to make the vehicle less detectable by the enemy. It may be noted that the control system 1412 ignores the input state of the second input device when the combat override switch is on. The third column in the truth table could therefore instead be the output of a safety interlock, since safety interlocks are another example of input information that is sometimes ignored when a combat override is turned on. This would allow the control system 1412 to take into account the urgency of a combat situation while still also implementing safety functions to the extent that they do not interfere with the operation of the vehicle 1410.

[0177] The truth table also has a number of additional states (five through nine) corresponding to situations in which one or both of the inputs is designated as undetermined ("?" in Fig. 19). Thus, for example, in states five and six, the input state of the operator switch (input #2) is designated as undetermined. The undetermined state of the operator switch may be the result of the failure of the interface module that receives the input signal from the operator switch, a failure of the electrical connection between the switch and the interface module, and/or a failure of the operator switch itself. In the fifth state, when the combat override switch is off and the state of the operator switch is undetermined, the control system 1412 turns on the headlights, based on the assumption that if it is nighttime the operator wants the lights on and if it is daytime the operator does not have a strong preference either way. In the sixth state, when the combat override switch is on and the state of the operator switch

is undetermined, the control system 1412 turns off the headlights, because the headlights should always be turned off in the combat mode of operation.

[0178] In states seven through nine, the input state of the combat override switch (input #1) is designated as undetermined. The undetermined state of the combat override switch may be caused by generally the same factors that are liable to cause the state of the operator switch to be undetermined. In all of these states, the control system 1412 turns off the headlights, based on the worst case assumption that the military vehicle may be in combat and that therefore the headlights should be turned off.

[0179] The arrangement shown in Fig. 19 is thus applied to all output devices 1450 on the military vehicle. In this way, the control logic for controlling the output devices is expanded to take into account a third "undetermined" state for each of the input devices, and an entire additional layer of failure management is added to the control logic. In this way, the control system 1412 is able to remain operational (at least in a best guess mode) when the input states of one or more input devices cannot be determined. This prevents output devices that have an output state based on the input state of a given input device from being crippled when a system failure causes one or more input devices to be lost.

[0180] This arrangement also allows the output state of each output device to be programmed individually in failure situations. In other words, when a given input device is lost, the control system can be programmed to assume for purposes of some output devices (using the above described truth table arrangement) that the input device is on and to assume for the purposes of other output devices that the input device is off. For example, in Fig. 19, if output device #2 is another output device that is controlled by the same operator switch, the control system can be programmed to assume for purposes of output device #2 that the operator switch is off in state five rather than on, such that the control system turns off the output device #2 in state five. In this

way, it is not necessary to assume the same input state for purposes of all output devices.

[0181] It may also be noted that military vehicles tend to make widespread use of redundant sensors. In this case, by connecting the redundant sensors to different ones of the interface modules, the state table for each output device can be modified to accept either input, thereby making it possible for the control system 1412 to obtain the same information by a different route. Further, if the redundant sensors disagree on the input status of a system parameter, then this disagreement itself can be treated as an undetermined input state of an input device. In this way, rather than using a voting procedure in which the sensors vote on the state of the input device for purposes of all output devices, the uncertainty can be taken into account and best guess decisions regarding how to operate can be made for each of the various output devices individually.

[0182] As previously described, each interface module 1420 has total system awareness. Specifically, the data memory 1834 of each interface module 1420 stores I/O status information 1848 for not only local I/O devices 1440 and 1450 but also for non-local I/O devices 1440 and 1450 connected to remaining ones of the interface modules 1420. Referring now to Figs. 20-23, a preferred technique for transmitting I/O status information between the interface modules 1420 will now be described. Although this technique is primarily described in connection with the chassis control system 1511, this technique is preferably also applied to the variant control system 1512 and the auxiliary control system 1513, and/or in the control system 12.

[0183] Referring first to Fig. 20, as previously described, the chassis control system 1511 includes the interface modules 1421-1425, the input devices 1441, and the output devices 1451. Also shown in Fig. 20 are the display 1481, the data logger 1485, and the communication network 1661 which connects the interface modules 1421-1425. In practice, the system may include additional devices, such as a plurality of switch interface modules

connected to additional I/O devices, which for simplicity are not shown. The switch interface modules may be the same as the switch interface modules 20 previously described and, for example, may be provided in the form of a separate enclosed unit or in the more simple form of a circuit board mounted with associated switches and low power output devices. In practice, the system may include other systems, such as a display interface used to drive one or more analog displays (such as gauges) using data received from the communication network 1661. Any additional modules that interface with I/O devices preferably broadcast and receive I/O status information and exert local control in the same manner as detailed below in connection with the interface modules 1421-1425. As previously noted, one or more additional communication networks may also be included which are preferably implemented in accordance with SAE J1708/1587 and/or J1939 standards. The communication networks may be used, for example, to receive I/O status information from other vehicle systems, such as an engine or transmission control system. Arbitration of I/O status broadcasts between the communication networks can be performed by one of the interface modules 1420.

[0184] To facilitate description, the input devices 1441 and the output devices 1451 have been further subdivided and more specifically labeled in Fig. 20. Thus, the subset of the input devices 1441 which are connected to the interface module 1421 are collectively labeled with the reference numeral 1541 and are individually labeled as having respective input states I-11 to I-15. Similarly, the subset of the output devices 1451 which are connected to the interface module 1421 are collectively labeled with the reference numeral 1551 and are individually labeled as having respective output states O-11 to O-15. A similar pattern has been followed for the interface modules 1422-1425, as summarized in Table I below:

Interface Module	Input Devices	Input States	Output Devices	Output States
1421	1541	I-11 to I-15	1551	O-11 to O-15
1422	1542	I-21 to I-25	1552	O-21 to O-25
1423	1543	I-31 to I-35	1553	O-31 to O-35
1424	1544	I-41 to I-45	1554	O-41 to O-45
1425	1545	I-51 to I-55	1555	O-51 to O-55

Table I

[0185] Of course, although five input devices 1441 and five output devices 1451 are connected to each of the interface modules 1420 in the illustrated embodiment, this number of I/O devices is merely exemplary and a different number of devices could also be used, as previously described.

[0186] The interface modules 1420 each comprise a respective I/O status table 1520 that stores information pertaining to the I/O states of the input and output devices 1441 and 1451. Referring now to Fig. 21, an exemplary one of the I/O status tables 1520 is shown. As shown in Fig. 21, the I/O status table 1520 stores I/O status information pertaining to each of the input states I-11 to I-15, I-21 to I-25, I-31 to I-35, I-41 to I-45, and I-51 to I-55 of the input devices 1541-1545, respectively, and also stores I/O status information pertaining to each of the output states O-11 to O-15, O-21 to O-25, O-31 to O-35, O-41 to O-45, and O-51 to O-55 of the output devices 1551 to 1555, respectively. The I/O status tables 1520 are assumed to be identical, however, each I/O status table 1520 is individually maintained and updated by the corresponding interface module 1420. Therefore, temporary differences may exist between the I/O status tables 1520 as updated I/O status information is received and stored. Although not shown, the I/O status table 1520 also stores I/O status information for the interface modules 1426-1428 of the variant control system 1512 and the interface modules 1429-1430 of the auxiliary control system 1513.

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[0187] In practice, although Fig. 21 shows the I/O status information being stored next to each other, the memory locations that store the I/O status information need not be contiguous and need not be located in the same physical media. It may also be noted that the I/O status table 1520 is, in practice, implemented such that different I/O states are stored using different amounts of memory. For example, some locations store a single bit of information (as in the case of a digital input device or digital output device) and other locations store multiple bits of information (as in the case of an analog input device or an analog output device). The manner in which the I/O status table is implemented is dependent on the programming language used and on the different data structures available within the programming language that is used. In general, the term I/O status table is broadly used herein to encompass any group of memory locations that are useable for storing I/O status information.

[0188] Also shown in Fig. 21 are a plurality of locations that store intermediate status information, labeled IM-11, IM-21, IM-22, and IM-41. The intermediate states IM-11, IM-21, IM-22, and IM-41 are processed versions of selected I/O states. For example, input signals may be processed for purposes of scaling, unit conversion and/or calibration, and it may be useful in some cases to store the processed I/O status information. Alternatively, the intermediate states IM-11, IM-21, IM-22, and IM-41 may be a function of a plurality of I/O states that in combination have some particular significance. The processed I/O status information is then transmitted to the remaining interface modules 1420.

[0189] Referring now to Figs. 22-23, Fig. 22 is a flowchart describing the operation of the control system of Fig. 20, and Fig. 23 is a data flow diagram describing data flow through an exemplary interface module during the process of Fig. 22. As an initial matter, it should be noted that although Fig. 22 depicts a series of steps which are performed sequentially, the steps shown in Fig. 22 need not be performed in any particular order. In practice, for

example, modular programming techniques are used and therefore some of the steps are performed essentially simultaneously. Additionally, it may be noted that the steps shown in Fig. 22 are performed repetitively during the operation of the interface module 1421, and some of the steps are in practice performed more frequently than others. For example, input information is acquired from the input devices more often than the input information is broadcast over the communication network. Although the process of Fig. 22 and the data flow diagram of Fig. 23 are primarily described in connection with the interface module 1421, the remaining interface modules 1422-1425 operate in the same manner.

[0190] At step 1852, the interface module 1421 acquires input status information from the local input devices 1541. The input status information, which pertains to the input states I-11 to I-15 of the input devices 1541, is transmitted from the input devices 1541 to the interface module 1421 by way of respective dedicated communication links, as previously described in connection with Figs. 2-3. At step 1854, the input status information acquired from the local input devices 1541 is stored in the I/O status table 1520 at a location 1531. For the interface module 1421, the I/O devices 1541 and 1551 are referred to as local I/O devices since the I/O devices 1541 and 1551 are directly coupled to the interface module 1421 by way of respective dedicated communication links, as opposed to the remaining non-local I/O devices and 1542-1545 and 1552-1555 which are indirectly coupled to the interface module 1421 by way of the communication network 1661.

[0191] At step 1856, the interface module 1421 acquires I/O status information for the non-local input devices 1542-1545 and the non-local output devices 1552-1555 by way of the communication network 1661. Specifically, the interface module 1421 acquires input status information pertaining to the input states I-21 to I-25, I-31 to I-35, I-41 to I-45, I-51 to I-55 of the input devices 1542-1545, respectively, and acquires output status information pertaining to the output states O-21 to O-25, O-31 to O-35, O-41 to

O-45, O-51 to O-55 of the output devices 1552-1555. The input status information and the output status information are stored in locations 1533 and 1534 of the I/O status table 1520, respectively.

[0192] At step 1860, the interface module 1421 determines desired output states O-11 to O-15 for the output devices 1551. As previously noted, each of the interface modules 1420 stores a chassis control program 1840, one or more variant control programs 1842, and an auxiliary control program 1844. The interface module 1421 is associated with the chassis control system 1511 and, therefore, executes a portion of the chassis control program 1840. (The portion of the chassis control program 1840 executed by the interface module 1421 is determined by the location of the interface module 1421 on the military vehicle 1410, as previously described.) The interface module 1421 executes the chassis control program 1840 to determine the desired output states O-11 to O-15 based on the I/O status information stored in the I/O status table 1520. Preferably, each interface module 1420 has complete control of its local output devices 1450, such that only I/O status information is transmitted on the communication network 1460 between the interface modules 1420.

[0193] At step 1862, the interface module 1421 controls the output devices 1551 in accordance with the desired respective output states O-11 to O-15. Once the desired output state for a particular output device 1551 has been determined, control is achieved by transmitting a control signal to the particular output device 1551 by way of a dedicated communication link. For example, if the output is a digital output device (e.g., a headlight controlled in on/off fashion), then the control signal is provided by providing power to the headlight by way of the dedicated communication link. Ordinarily, the actual output state and the desired output state for a particular output device are the same, especially in the case of digital output devices. However, this is not always the case. For example, if the headlight mentioned above is burned out, the actual output state of the headlight may be "off," even though the desired

output state of the light is "on." Alternatively, for an analog output device, the desired and actual output states may be different if the control signal is not properly calibrated for the output device.

[0194] At step 1864, the interface module 1421 stores output status information pertaining to the desired output states O-11 to O-15 for the output devices 1551 in the I/O status table 1520. This allows the output states O-11 to O-15 to be stored prior to being broadcast on the communication network 1661. At step 1866, the interface module 1421 broadcasts the input status information pertaining to the input states I-11 to I-15 of the input devices 1541 and the output status information pertaining to the output states O-11 to O-15 of the output devices 1551 over the communication network 1661. The I/O status information is received by the interface modules 1422-1425. Step 1866 is essentially the opposite of step 1856, in which non-local I/O status information is acquired by the interface module 1421 by way of the communication network 1661. In other words, each interface module 1420 broadcasts its portion of the I/O status table 1520 on the communication network 1661, and monitors the communication network 1661 for broadcasts from the remaining interface modules 1420 to update the I/O status table 1520 to reflect updated I/O states for the non-local I/O devices 1441 and 1451. In this way, each interface module 1420 is able to maintain a complete copy of the I/O status information for all of the I/O devices 1441 and 1451 in the system.

[0195] The interface modules 1423 and 1425 are used to transmit I/O status information between the various control systems 1511-1513. Specifically, as previously noted, the interface module 1423 is connected to both the communication network 1661 for the chassis control system 1511 and to the communication network 1662 for the variant control system 1512 (see Fig. 16). The interface module 1423 is preferably utilized to relay broadcasts of I/O status information back and forth between the interface modules 1421-1425 of the chassis control system 1511 and the interface modules 1426-1428 of the variant control system 1512. Similarly, the interface

module 1425 is connected to both the communication network 1661 for the chassis control system 1511 and the to the communication network 1663 for the auxiliary control system 1513 (see Fig. 16), and the interface module 1425 is preferably utilized to relay broadcasts of I/O status information back and forth between the interface modules 1421-1425 of the chassis control system 1511 and the interface modules 1429-1430 of the auxiliary control system 1513.

[0196] The arrangement of Figs. 20-23 is advantageous because it provides a fast and efficient mechanism for updating the I/O status information 1848 stored in the data memory 1834 of each of the interface modules 1420. Each interface module 1420 automatically receives, at regular intervals, complete I/O status updates from each of the remaining interface modules 1420. There is no need to transmit data request (polling) messages and data response messages (both of which require communication overhead) to communicate information pertaining to individual I/O states between individual I/O modules 1420. Although more I/O status data is transmitted, the transmissions require less overhead and therefore the overall communication bandwidth required is reduced.

[0197] This arrangement also increases system responsiveness. First, system responsiveness is improved because each interface module 1420 receives current I/O status information automatically, before the information is actually needed. When it is determined that a particular piece of I/O status information is needed, there is no need to request that information from another interface module 1420 and subsequently wait for the information to arrive via the communication network 1661. The most current I/O status information is already assumed to be stored in the local I/O status table 1520. Additionally, because the most recent I/O status information is always available, there is no need to make a preliminary determination whether a particular piece of I/O status information should be acquired. Boolean control laws or other control laws are applied in a small number of steps based on the I/O status information already stored in the I/O status table 1520. Conditional control loops designed

to avoid unnecessarily acquiring I/O status information are avoided and, therefore, processing time is reduced.

[0198] It may also be noted that, according to this arrangement, there is no need to synchronize the broadcasts of the interface modules 1420. Each interface module 1420 monitors the communication network 1661 to determine if the communication network 1661 is available and, if so, then the interface module broadcasts the I/O status information for local I/O devices 1441 and 1451. (Standard automotive communication protocols such as SAE J1708 or J1939 provide the ability for each member of the network to monitor the network and broadcast when the network is available.) Although it is desirable that the interface modules rebroadcast I/O status information at predetermined minimum intervals, the broadcasts may occur asynchronously.

[0199] The technique described in connection with Figs. 20-23 also provides an effective mechanism for detecting that an interface module 1420 has been rendered inoperable, for example, due to damage incurred in combat. As just noted, the interface modules 1420 rebroadcast I/O status information at predetermined minimum intervals. Each interface module 1420 also monitors the amount of time elapsed since an update was received from each remaining interface module 1420. Therefore, when a particular interface module 1420 is rendered inoperable due to combat damage, the inoperability of the interface module 1420 can be detected by detecting the failure of the interface module 1420 to rebroadcast its I/O status information within a predetermined amount of time. Preferably, the elapsed time required for a particular interface module 1420 to be considered inoperable is several times the expected minimum rebroadcast time, so that each interface module 1420 is allowed a certain number of missed broadcasts before the interface module 1420 is considered inoperable. A particular interface module 1420 may be operable and may broadcast I/O status information, but the broadcast may not be received by the remaining interface modules 1420 due, for example, to noise on the communication network.

[0200] This arrangement also simplifies the operation of the data logger 1485 and automatically permits the data logger 1485 to store I/O status information for the entire control system 1412. The data logger 1485 monitors the communication network 1661 for I/O status broadcasts in the same way as the interface modules 1420. Therefore, the data logger 1485 automatically receives complete system updates and is able to store these updates for later use.

[0201] As previously noted, in the preferred embodiment, the interface modules 1423 and 1425 are used to transmit I/O status information between the various control systems 1511-1513. In an alternative arrangement, the interface module 1429 which is connected to all three of the communication networks 1661-1663 could be utilized instead. Although less preferred, the interface module 1429 may be utilized to receive I/O status information from each of the interface modules 1421-1428 and 1430, assemble the I/O status data into an updated I/O status table, and then rebroadcast the entire updated I/O status table 1520 to each of the remaining interface modules 1421-1428 and 1430 at periodic or aperiodic intervals. Therefore, in this embodiment, I/O status information for all of the interface modules 1420 is routed through the interface module 1429 and the interface modules 1420 acquire I/O status information for non-local I/O devices 1440 and 1450 by way of the interface module 1429 rather than directly from the remaining interface modules 1420.

[0202] From the foregoing description, a number of advantages of the preferred military vehicle control system are apparent, some of which have already been mentioned. First, the control system is constructed and arranged such that failure at a single location does not render the entire vehicle inoperable. The control system has the ability to dynamically reconfigure itself in the event that one or more interface modules are lost. By avoiding the use of a central control unit that is fixed at one location, and using a moving central

control unit, there is no single point failure. If a master interface modules fails, another interface module will assume the position of the central control unit.

[0203] Additionally, because the interface modules are interchangeable, if one interface module is damaged, it is possible to field service the control system by swapping interface modules, obtained either from within the vehicle itself or from another vehicle, even if the other vehicle is not the same variant type. This allows the effectiveness of the military vehicle to be maximized by allowing undamaged interface modules to be utilized in the most optimal manner.

[0204] The use of the control system 1412 in connection with multipurpose modular vehicles is also advantageous. When the variant module is mounted to the chassis, all that is required is to connect power, ground and the communication network. Only one connector is required for all of the different types of variants. This avoids the need for a separate connector on the chassis for each different type of variant module, along with the additional unutilized hardware and wiring, as has conventionally been the approach utilized.

[0205] Moreover, since every interface module has a copy of the application program, it is possible to test each interface module as an individual unit. The ability to do subassembly testing facilitates assembly of the vehicle because defective mechanisms can be replaced before the entire vehicle is assembled.

[0206] Finally, the advantages regarding flexibility, robustness, ease of use, maintainability, and so on, that were discussed above in connection with firefighting vehicles also apply to military vehicles. For example, it is often desirable in military applications to provide vehicles with consoles for both a left-hand driver and a right-hand driver. This option can be implemented without complex wiring arrangements with the preferred control system, due to the distributed data collection and the intelligent processing of information from input devices. Likewise, features such as "smart start" (in which vehicle starting

is controlled automatically to reduce faulty starts due to operator error) can be implemented by the control system without any additional hardware.

[0207] Many other changes and modifications may be made to the present invention without departing from the spirit thereof. The scope of these and other changes will become apparent from the appended claims.

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